

The Impact of Problems on Relationship Commitment

by

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A Research Paper

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the

Master of Science Degree

in

Marriage and Family Therapy

Approved: Two Semester Credits

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August, 2003

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ABSTRACT

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The Impact of Problems on Relationship Commitment

Marriage and Family Therapy

Dr. Dale Hawley August 1st, 2003 64 Pages

American Psychological Association, 5th edition

Forty-five college students in summer classes in a Mid-Western university were invited to participate in a quantitative study investigating how problems in relationships affect the level of commitment to the relationship. Participants indicated specific problems present in their current relationship and the severity of the problem as well as completing a commitment scale. Results indicated that for all couples and only unmarried couples without children, infidelity and alcohol and drug issues significantly affect commitment levels. Total number of problems indicated affects commitment levels as well. When only severe problems are taken into account the number of problems significantly affects the commitment scores of unmarried couples without children, but not for all couples. Severe problems with jealousy and trust significantly affect commitment scores of all couples whereas for unmarried couples without children severe problems with alcohol and drug use, temper outbursts, physical, emotional, or verbal abuse, and trust all affect commitment scores. This data adds to the current research regarding relationship commitment.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to express sincere appreciation to Dr. Dale Hawley for his assistance in completing this study. His knowledge and constructive comments proved invaluable to the success of this study. Appreciation is also extended to Christine Ness for sharing her knowledge of and assisting with programming the data.

The author would also like to thank Dr. Scott Zimmerman, Dr. Judy Rommel, Dr. Diane Klemme, and Gladys Earl for allowing the study to be carried out within their classrooms. The donation of classroom time is greatly appreciated.

Appreciation is also extended to the many friends and family members who gave their support and encouragement throughout the completion of this study.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

For many years researchers have been interested in the factors contributing to stability in close, personal relationships. Initially, researchers assumed that relationship satisfaction was the only factor in predicting whether a relationship would continue or dissolve. However, conflicting research, demonstrating that not all unsatisfying relationships end, forced theorists to rethink their hypothesis (Goode, 1956, Heaton & Albrecht, 1991). Researchers were also surprised to find that often happy relationships end due to changes in circumstances beyond relationship satisfaction (Rusbult, 1983). Clearly, a new concept for understanding relationship stability was needed.

The construct of commitment provides an understanding for the conflicting results in the literature. The existing research identifies commitment as having three dimensions: (1) an attractive dimension; (2) a moral normative dimension; and (3) a constraining dimension (Adams & Jones, 1999). The attractive dimension has been identified as being related to couples marital quality. However, the other two dimensions of commitment relate to obligation felt by the partner in the relationship and barriers to ending the relationship. Clearly, the three dimensions of commitment assist researchers in explaining the differing results found in the relationships stability literature. However, while development of the three dimensions of commitment provides a better understanding of relationship stability, still lacking is research investigating the exact nature of the relationship between commitment and stability and the factors involved in each.

Statement of the problem

Empirical exploration of the construct of commitment began only just recently. In fact, the majority of studies regarding the construct of commitment within relationships have been published after 1980 (Adams & Jones, 1999). However, commitment plays a critical role in the creation and maintenance of interpersonal relationships, a construct with a relatively long research history. Clearly, a deficit exists in the literature surrounding the role commitment plays in personal relationships.

The existing research commitment has been divided into three distinct dimensions; an attraction dimension, a moral-normative dimension, and a constraining dimension. Researchers studying the attraction dimension of commitment have evaluated the happiness, overall well-being, and satisfaction within the relationship (Broderick & O'Leary, 1986; Hendrick, Hendrick, & Adler, 1988; Rusbult, 1983; Rusbult, Johnson, & Morrow, 1986). This research indicates that satisfaction leads to greater commitment in relationships. However, a full understanding of this causal relationship has yet to be determined (Adams & Jones, 1999). Obviously more research concerning relationship quality and commitment would contribute to the knowledge of how these two constructs interact within relationships.

Much of the research investigating the attraction dimension of commitment involves married participants despite evidence supporting the marital relationship as being a major determinant of the moral-normative dimension of commitment (Johnson, Caughlin, & Huston, 1999; Swenson & Trahaug, 1985; Stanley & Markman, 1992; Stanley, Markman, and Whitton, 2002; Broderick & O'Leary, 1986; Scanzoni & Arnett, 1987). While research has yet to examine the effect of one dimension of commitment on the other two dimensions, the use of married couples to evaluate any dimension other than the moral-normative dimension could pose a

potential problem. Johnson (1991) defined the moral-normative dimension of commitment as one's personal sense of obligation to maintain a relationship. Clearly, a marital relationship typically creates within the partners a greater sense of obligation towards the other partner. In fact, Heaton and Albrecht (1991) found that 65.8% of unhappy couples do not view divorce as a possibility. Researchers credit this finding to the couple's commitment to the institution of marriage. Thus it can be assumed that a change in marital status will create a change in the level of commitment toward that relationship. Since the exact relationship between the three dimensions has yet to be fully understood, utilizing married couples as opposed to unmarried could affect commitment levels found in studies which seek to address the attraction dimension of commitment only. Clearly, this poses a threat to the validity this research.

Similar assumptions can be made regarding the effect having children in a relationship may have on commitment levels. Children would fall under the constraint dimension of commitment, defined as a sense that there are barriers to leaving a relationship. Many studies, however, neglect to report the parental status of participants and of those that do, most do not separate the parents from the non-parents for questions regarding the attraction dimension of commitment (Burns, 1984; Heaton & Albrecht, 1991; Godwin & Scanzoni, 1989; Swenson & Trahaug, 1985). Obviously, the potential for parenthood to affect commitment levels would lead to validity problems in studies looking at the attraction dimension of commitment only.

While the attraction dimension has obviously been investigated in terms of relationship quality, satisfaction, and love, researchers have yet to look directly at the effect of problems in relationships on the level of commitment toward the relationship. Problems in relationships have been well-known as causes of relationship dissolution. In one study investigating divorce, when asked the cause of the marital break-up participants listed particular problems that were found in

their relationships (Kitson & Sussman, 1982). Clearly, problems in relationships affect the stability of relationships. As previously stated, commitment also directly affects whether a relationship continues or dissolves, making the relationship between problems in a relationship and commitment towards the relationship of particular interest.

Purpose of the study

The present study seeks to contribute in several ways to the literature on commitment. First, the research continues the investigation into the causal relationship between level of commitment in a relationship and the quality of the relationship. Second, in an effort to expand current research to investigate couples with lower moral-normative commitment levels, the study included two data sets which included only participants who were unmarried and did not have children. Finally, the research also looks at attraction dimension of commitment in terms of specific problems in the relationship. This differs from previous research which has focused on the level of satisfaction, happiness, and overall well-being in the relationship.

Hypothesis

For all couples, both married or unmarried and with or without children, the number of problems indicated as present in the relationship will significantly correlate with the average commitment score. If only unmarried couples without children are considered the significance of this correlation will increase. When the severity level of the problem is taken into account the significance of both of these correlations will increase.

For each individual problem a significant difference between the average commitment scores of those couples indicating the problem as present in their relationship and those who did not will be found. The significance will increase when only unmarried couples without children are considered as well as when problem severity is taken into account. Issues with infidelity, abuse, alcohol and drugs, in-laws, sexual issues, and financial issues will be indicated as problems in relationships more than other issues listed.

Justifications for the study

Current research on commitment lags behind research in other areas of interpersonal relationships, specifically relationship quality and satisfaction. Hinde (1979) labeled commitment as one of the most important aspects of some relationships and yet the least studied. Neither quality nor satisfaction in a relationship have been able to accurately predict relationship stability on a consistent basis. Studies investigating relationship commitment however, have successfully predicted the stability of a relationship (Lund, 1985). Clearly, this research demonstrates the need for more studies to be done in the area of commitment.

Within most relationships, the institution of marriage and the involvement of children contribute greatly to the moral-normative level of commitment felt toward the relationship. Typically these factors lead to an increase in overall commitment in a relationship. However, much of the research in the area of commitment has focused on adult, married couples. Indeed, most studies investigating the attraction dimension of commitment involve married couple's satisfaction, failing to acknowledge the marriage as an important factor adding to level of commitment felt by the partner's. Similarly studies often fail to mention whether or not the

couples involved in the research have children. Clearly, this piece of knowledge has been neglected in the literature.

The current research on the attraction dimension of commitment has yet to specifically exam the effect problems in a relationship have on the level of commitment felt toward the relationship. Researchers have investigated various aspects of attraction commitment including satisfaction, love, and happiness in the relationship. None of these studies, however, looks at relationship quality from the perspective of problems reported in the relationship. Relationship problems have been demonstrated to be important in the stability of the relationship in previous research (Goode, 1956; Levinger, 1966; Kitson and Sussman, 1982). Obviously, the interaction between problems in relationships and commitment to the relationship should be investigated further.

Assumptions of the study

The current study assumes the concepts of relationship satisfaction and the attraction dimension of commitment to be separate and distinct. Several investigators have presented conflicting views on whether or not marital quality and attraction commitment refer to conceptually different phenomena. Many studies have shown the two constructs to share more than 50 % of the common variance (Jones, Adams, Monroe, and Barry, 1995 and Sacher & Fine, 1996). However, despite the similarities between the two, Adams and Jones (1999) suggest there is good reason to maintain the distinction between the concepts. Researchers point to the unexplainable 40 % of the co-variation between the two constructs. Also, research has demonstrated that satisfaction and the attraction dimension of commitment correlate differently with other concepts. Obviously research has yet to fully understand the difference between the

two constructs. For the purposes of this study the two constructs will be assumed to be conceptually different as suggested by Adams and Jones (1999).

Definition of terms

Vocabulary 1: Commitment. Hinde (1979) defines commitment as referring to situations in which either one or both partners intend their relationship as continuing indefinitely or behave in a way which promotes the continuance of their relationships. Similarly, Rusbult's (1980) definition relates commitment to the probability the individual will leave the relationship, adding that this involves feelings of psychological attachment. Lund (1985) provides yet another related definition of commitment which includes: (1) judgments about a relationships likely permanence; (2) expectations for avoiding involvement in other relationships; (3) anticipation of losses if a relationships ends. For the purposes of our study commitment will be defined as the expectation that a relationship will continue indefinitely, paired with actions which promote this continuance; and losses associated with the relationship's end. Each of these characteristics of commitment fits with the three dimensional model of commitment which includes an attraction dimension, a moral-normative dimension, and a structural dimension.

Vocabulary 2: Attraction dimension of commitment. A desire for the relationship to continue due to the rewards associated with the relationship. This includes feelings of love, desire, happiness, satisfaction, psychological attachment, intimacy, closeness, and other related feelings.

Vocabulary 3: Moral normative dimension of commitment. Beliefs, values, and ideals regarding the continuance of particular types of relationships and the moral responsibility one has to the

relationships. This includes religious beliefs/values, social norms and expectations, and personal beliefs regarding commitment, and other related ideals.

Vocabulary 4: Structural/constraint dimension of commitment. Barriers to exiting the relationship which affect whether or not the relationship continues. This includes children, finances, material possessions, mutual friends, and other related constraints.

Vocabulary 5: Relationship problem. Any issue which one partner views as affecting the relationship in a negative way. Several typical problems areas were suggested in the study as well as a space for other problems not listed.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Although many theoretical models of commitment exist, the vast majority imply three basic dimensions of commitment; the attraction dimension, the moral-normative dimension, and the structural/constraint dimension. This literature review intends to overview the ideas of several major theorists in the area of interpersonal commitment. This chapter will also summarize the current understanding of each of the three dimensions of commitment. Finally, the role of problems in relationships will be reviewed as it is understood to date.

Review of commitment theories

Goode: Attraction versus constraint

In 1948 Goode, in the first massive study of divorcees, interviewed 425 divorced metropolitan mothers regarding their complaints about their ex-husbands (Goode, 1956). From this data Goode hoped to evaluate the causes of marital breakdown. However, instead of finding one clear answer, the resulting data demonstrated that many different factors contribute to marital disruption at different points in a marriage. In longer marriages the complaints mentioned included lack of interest in the home, excessive drinking, infidelity, and the combination of drinking, gambling, and “running around with other women.” Meanwhile, divorcees from shorter marriages were more likely to complain of personality problems instead. Goode also pointed out that none of these complaints could solely explain the reason for divorce since many still married women make similar complaints about their husbands. The results proved puzzling to many researchers.

Conflicting results prompted Goode to develop a theory regarding the role of commitment in both happy, stable marriages, and in “empty shell” marriages in which the relationship continues despite a lack of happiness. According to Goode (1959), couples in happy, satisfying marriages demonstrate a commitment toward resolving conflicts and providing each other with physical and emotional rewards. These couples remain committed on the basis of the attraction of the relationship. On the other hand, couples in long lasting marriages in which there appears to be little satisfaction or happiness appear to remain committed for reasons of structure and compliance with their moral beliefs. Couples who demonstrate this structural commitment to their relationship may avoid divorce for a variety of reasons including for their children’s emotional well-being, a strongly held belief that divorce is morally unacceptable, or social pressure to remain married.

Hinde: Endogenous versus exogenous commitment

Similar to Goode’s attraction aspect, Hinde (1979) labeled endogenous commitment as the commitment coming from within the partners in the relationship. This commitment extends from the desire to be in the most rewarding relationship. Endogenous commitment can be characterized by the desire to provide one another with rewards in order to prevent another relationship from becoming more attractive. Continuity of the relationship will always be desired in an endogenously committed relationship, but not necessarily ensured. Clearly, endogenous commitment as presented by Hinde appears similar to Goode’s attraction aspect of commitment.

Hinde also labeled exogenous commitment, a concept similar to Goode’s moral/structural aspect of commitment. Unlike, endogenous commitment, exogenous commitment comes from the partner’s belief that external factors will keep the marriage intact rather than actively working

on the relationship. An example of an exogenous commitment might be an arranged marriage in which neither partner had a hand in the decision to marry. In such cases, the circumstances surrounding the marriage guarantee that the relationship will continue rather than the individuals in the relationship choosing to remain married. In an exogenously committed relationship continuance is assured. Thus partners will either strive to optimize the rewards in the relationship or discontinue all efforts toward the relationship. Hinde notes that endogenous commitment can lead to exogenous commitment when binding ties such as matrimonial vows become a part of a relationship.

Lund: Barrier model

In 1985, Lund introduced the barrier model, which proposed that investments into a relationship keep the relationship together, rather than attraction and constraint. In the barrier model commitment is defined as an individual's attitude about continuing a relationship that is strengthened by investing in that relationship. Lund comments that this "attitudinal" commitment leads to irretrievable resources lost in the relationship and must therefore weigh into any decision regarding whether or not to continue the relationship. Thus, the amount of investment at any time directly relates to the amount of commitment to the relationship and acts as a barrier against ending the relationship.

Lund does not neglect the attraction dimension of commitment mentioned by Goode (1956) and Hinde (1979), but places minimal value on the importance of attraction in developing commitment. According to Lund, attraction may be the force which initially begins the investment process. In new relationships the desire for the immediate rewards, or attractions, will motivate individuals to invest small amounts such as spending time together, purchasing gifts, or

doing favors for each other. Eventually, however, the investment process becomes functionally autonomous and can be distinguished from the attraction dimension.

Rusbult: Investment model

The investment model, developed by Rusbult (1980) integrates the constraint and attraction dimensions of Goode (1956) and Hinde (1979), with the investment component developed by Lund (1985). This model gathers its basis from Kelley and Thibaut's interdependence theory (1978), which assumes that all individuals are motivated to maximize rewards while minimizing costs. Interdependence theory states that satisfaction with and attraction to a relationship relates directly to the difference between the outcome value of the relationship and the individual's comparison level which is defined as their expectations concerning the quality of relationships in general (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959).

According to the investment model, the outcome value of a relationship is defined by the function:

$$O_X = \sum w_i a_i$$

where a_i represents the value of attribute i available in the relationship X , as measured by the individual's subjective opinion, and w_i represents the level of importance of attribute i as measured by the individual as well. In this model, the value of an attribute may be positive or negative to represent rewards or costs in the relationship. For example, intelligence would most likely be an attribute with a positive a_i value to represent its status as a reward in the relationship. Since intelligence is typically seen as fairly important to a relationship the w_i value would most likely be high as well. According to the investment model, as the value of a particular reward available in the relationship increases the value of the relationship increases as well. Similarly, as

the level of importance placed on that value increases the relationships value again increases.

Thus, increases in both value and importance of a particular cost, would decrease the value of the relationship.

The final outcome value of the relationship must then be compared to the individual's comparison level. According to investment theory, the comparison level represents each individual's particular average outcome value they've come to expect in every relationship based on the quality of past experiences, and comparison to others relationships. Individual's comparison levels for relationships can thus change throughout their lives as they encounter new experiences and relationships. Attractiveness of every relationship will be evaluated against this standard measure and will affect the comparison level for the next relationship.

Individuals use their comparison levels to evaluate the levels of satisfaction and attraction within their present relationships. According to the investment model, individuals measure the satisfaction within their relationship X , as:

$$SAT_x = O_x - CL$$

where, O_x represents the outcome value for the current relationship, and CL represents the individual's comparison level for relationships. Based on this model, satisfaction is inversely related to a person's comparison level such that as an individual's expectations in a relationship increase their satisfaction with a static relationship will decrease. The model also shows that as rewards of the relationship increase or costs decrease, satisfaction will also increase.

Commitment, however, cannot be determined by satisfaction within a relationship alone, but requires evaluation of the individual's best available alternative as well. In some relationships the best alternative would be a new relationship, but the best alternative could also be no

relationship at all. Either way, the outcome value of the alternative relationship, O_Y would be calculated in the same way as the outcome value of the current relationship, i.e.:

$$O_Y = \sum a_i w_i$$

where a_i represents the value of attribute i found in the alternative relationship and w_i represents the importance placed by the individual on attribute i . Using this outcome value of the alternative, one can estimate the satisfaction expected from the alternative relationship (A_Y) using the same formula used to evaluate satisfaction with the current relationship:

$$A_Y = O_Y - CL$$

Using this formula as the rewards of the best possible alternative increase, or as its costs decrease, the alternative shall be evaluated more positively. Similarly, if the individual's comparison level decreases the satisfaction predicted with the alternative will increase. However, when comparing the individual's satisfaction with the current relationship to the predicted satisfaction, comparison level cancels out and the final comparison relies on the rewards and costs of the two relationships alone:

$$(O_x - CL) - (O_Y - CL) = O_x - O_Y = SAT_x - A_Y$$

This final comparison will provide the individual with an evaluation of the potential merits of the alternative relationship with those of the current relationship. This comparison, however, does not provide a complete look at the commitment to the relationship.

The investment model states that commitment is affected by not only by the outcome values of both the alternative and current relationships, but also by the investment size, I_x . Investment size measures the resources invested in the relationship and the added cost of leaving the relationship caused by the investment. The investment model separates intrinsic investments from extrinsic investments. Extrinsic investments include those which may not have been initially

been associated with dissolution of the relationship, but through time have become linked to the relationship. For example, a person's home may not have originally been connected to their current relationship, but if at present they fear they may lose their home upon dissolution of their relationship, the home would now represent an intrinsic investment. One could also include shared memories, mutual friends, other material possessions, and any events uniquely associated with the relationship as extrinsic resources. Conversely, intrinsic resources include those which are put directly into the relationship. Examples of intrinsic investments might include time, emotional effort, money spent on maintenance of the relationship, and self-disclosures. Either type of investment would be lost if the current relationship dissolved and thus would be a cost to the individual. Following this theory, an individual with more investments of greater importance should be less likely to leave the relationship. Investment size can be defined as:

$$I_X = \sum w_j r_j$$

where, r_j refers to the size of the investment of resource to the relationship, and w_j refers to the subjective importance placed on the resource by the individual. Therefore, as the importance an individual places on a particular resource increases, the investment size increases and the relationship becomes harder to exit. The same holds for the size of the resource invested, such that as the size increases the cost of leaving increases too. However, investment alone cannot entirely account for commitment to a relationship.

Commitment, as defined by the investment theory, increases as the investment size increases, and is related to the relationship and alternative outcome values. Commitment can therefore be represented by the formula as follows:

$$COM_X = O_X + I_X - O_Y$$

According to this definition, commitment should increase as the number of investments increase, as the value of alternative relationships decreases, or as the value of the current relationship increases. Commitment, will decrease as the cost of the maintaining the current relationship increases, the cost of leaving the current relationship decreases, or as the value of alternatives increases. Investment theory also notes that all three variables do not interact with each other such that while attraction and satisfaction may be low, a high investment level could keep an individual committed to the relationship.

Johnson: The tripartite model of commitment

More recently, Johnson (1991) developed a theory of marital commitment which relates to both the attraction and constraining dimensions implied by previous theorists. According to Johnson, commitment can be defined by three major types of commitment; personal, moral, and structural. Personal and moral commitment are both internal forms of commitment, governed by the individuals own attitudes and values, whereas structural commitment comes from external costs to leaving the relationship. Johnson's theory also includes specific key factors which contribute to each of the three types of commitment.

Personal commitment

Johnson's (1991) concept of personal commitment directly relates the idea of the attraction dimension of commitment. Johnson defines personal commitment as the extent to which an individual wants to stay in a particular relationship. Personal commitment is affected by three components. The first component consists of a person's attraction to their current partner. This component does not necessarily include attraction to their partner's behavior however.

Instead partner's behavior falls under the second component of personal commitment, attraction to the relationship. By distinguishing the two constructs Johnson explains how one can be attracted to their partner, but not to their actions within the relationship. The third part of personal commitment is the identity of the couple. As a relationship grows the identity of the individuals expands to include the relationship as a part of their identity. The combination of attraction to one's partner, attraction to the relationship, and couple identity forms a construct similar to the attraction dimension mentioned by Goode (1956), Hinde (1979), and Rusbult (1980).

Moral commitment

Like, personal commitment, moral commitment consists of three components. First, a personally felt moral obligation contributes to moral commitment. This includes vows, promises, and a general moral understanding of "the right thing to do." Another component of moral commitment depends on the type of relationship in question. For example, some individuals have a strong moral belief which prevents them from divorcing. Another individual may disagree with leaving a pregnant partner. In both cases, the nature of the relationship contributed to the commitment level felt by the individual. Finally, the general moral principles which guide individuals in day to day life may contribute to moral commitment. For example, one may strongly believe in always finishing what they start, which might include marriage. Thus moral beliefs contribute in three ways to the overall moral commitment felt toward the relationship.

Structural commitment

The final type of commitment, structural commitment relates directly to the constraint dimension of commitment mentioned in earlier research. Johnson (1991) defines structural commitment as the sense of constraint or barriers to leaving a relationship. Johnson also notes that structural commitment will only be felt when personal and moral commitment are low. Thus no personal or moral reasons exist for continuing a relationship; one may feel trapped by the constraining costs of ending the relationship.

Four different types of constraints which make up structural commitment have been outlined by Johnson. First, Johnson agreed with Rusbult's (1980) idea that attractive potential alternatives to the relationship will affect relationship commitment. Unlike Rusbult, however, Johnson made note of the other constraining factors which affect the evaluation of the alternative including, housing, employment, children, etc. Social pressure or the expectations of peers' reactions to the break-up could also be seen as a constraint. For example, friends and family may impress their own moral beliefs about ending the relationship on the individual. A third related form of constraint includes the procedures involved in ending the relationship. More difficulty in separating increases the cost of leaving the relationship. Problems include splitting possessions, legal expenses and paperwork, and finding new housing. Finally, some resources invested throughout the course of the relationship will inevitably be lost. Most notable would be time, money, and emotional effort. Clearly, all four constraining factors contribute to the overall level of commitment.

Related commitment research

Based on the previous theories, Adams and Jones (1999) summarized interpersonal commitment as having three dimensions: (1) a moral-normative dimension, (2) a structural constraint dimension, and (3) an attraction dimension. While most researchers do not specify which component of commitment relates best to their research, one can infer this information based on the assessment tools used and the specific information gathered in the study. The following review attempts to highlight important research in each of the three components of commitment.

Moral-normative dimension

Research on moral reasons for continuing marriage first came into view in Goode's 1956 study of divorced mothers. In the winter of 1948, Goode interviewed 425 female divorcees from the Detroit metropolitan area regarding the problems which led to their divorce. Goode also examined the demographic characteristics of these women and their ex-husbands in order to further assess the causes of divorce. From this study Goode discovered divorce to be partially affected by religion and the frequency of the couple's church attendance. For example, Catholic couples relationship lasted an average of 9.4 years, whereas couples practicing the Protestant religion divorced after 9.1 years on average. The couples with other religious affiliation or who indicated no religion divorced after 8.5 years. Goode also found that for Catholics, as the regularity of church attendance increases, the length of the marriage increases as well. From this study Goode concluded that moral beliefs and values play a role in stay/leave decision for couples.

More recently several other researchers have examined the concept of moral commitment. In 1991, Heaton and Albrecht conducted a study of the 578 respondents to the National Survey of

Families and Households who reported their marital satisfaction as being low. The results indicated that the beliefs held by couples affect the likelihood of the unhappy marriage lasting. For example, couples who believe marriage is preferable to singlehood, that marriage is a lifetime commitment, and that couples should stay married for the sake of the children all increase the likelihood of remaining in an unhappy marriage. Also, even though all of the couples reported being in unsatisfying marriages, 65.8 percent indicated a less than even chance of divorce. Heaton and Albrecht credit these findings to commitment to the institution of marriage itself created by familial and societal norms and values. Similarly, Stanley and Markman (1992) examined 279 participants' responses to multiple measures of commitment. The researchers found that rather than a two factor model of constraint and dedication, the response indicated a three factor approach which included the first two and a morality of divorce factor. According to Stanley and Markman, this added factor represents the belief that divorce is morally unacceptable. In 1999, Johnson, Caughlin, and Huston tested this three factor model via phone interviews to 187 individuals. Similar to the results found by Stanley and Markman, the researchers found moral commitment to be a separate and distinct commitment experience from both personal and structural commitment. Clearly, commitment to a relationship is affected by the individual's personal moral beliefs and values regarding relationships.

Structural/constraint dimension

Research on the structural/constraint dimension of commitment formed out of the barrier model proposed by Lund (1985). In 1985, Lund surveyed 129 graduating seniors both in the winter prior to their graduation and the summer shortly after graduation. The participants filled out questionnaires which included a commitments scale, a love scale, a rewards scale, and an

investment scale. The investment scale consisted of 26 items evaluating the size and number of investments made by the individual to the relationship. Results from this study indicated that as the number of investments in the relationship increases, the level of commitment to the relationship increases as well. In this study, the barrier model successfully identified which relationships would dissolve. Another similar study by Sabatelli and Cecil-Pigo (1985), also evaluated the barriers which affect commitment. In their study 301 married individuals were presented with a multi-measure questionnaire which included an 11 item scale designed to evaluate both internal and external constraints or barriers to the dissolution of the marital relationship. Sabatelli and Cecil-Pigo found that the constraint of children increased husbands' marital commitment more than other barriers in general, but for wives other barriers increase commitment more than the presence of children. Overall, an increase in constraints led to an increase in commitment.

While many different types of constraint have been evaluated one area which has been particularly well-researched involves the impact of individuals' social networks on the level of commitment to the relationship. Flemlee and Sprecher (1992) presented longitudinal data of 101 dating couples and their responses to a love scale, a relationship assessment scale, a commitment scale, and several questions regarding social network variables. The results indicated that approval from one's social network and social network overlap increase the level of commitment to the relationship by both sexes. In 2001, Flemlee conducted a larger study of 446 students involved in romantic relationships. Results of this study are similar to those of previous studies and indicate that as approval from social networks increases, relationship commitment increases as well. Clearly, lacking approval from each individual's social network can be a barrier to commitment.

Research establishing constraint/structural commitment as being an independent dimension of commitment developed in the nineties. In 1992, Stanley and Markman evaluated forces that constrain individuals to maintain relationships regardless of their personal dedication to their partner. These constraints were divided into several categories including economic, social, personal, or psychological. The results confirmed that increased number of constraints increases the level of commitment toward the relationships. More than any other constraining factor examined, the presence of children in the relationship greatly increases commitment. The study also showed that constraints affect commitment even when personal dedication and moral commitment are low, thus establishing constraint commitment as a separate commitment factor. Johnson, Caughlin, and Huston (1999) repeated the results of the previous study in establishing personal, moral, and structural/constraint commitment as separable dimensions of commitment.

Attraction dimension

Initially, the attraction dimension of commitment grew out of attempts to establish love and commitment as completely separate concepts. In 1985, Lund sought to establish a construct of commitment which would be distinct from the construct of love. Lund created a measure of commitment which focused on the expectation that the relationship would continue rather than the desire for the continuance of the relationship. Successful tests of this new commitment scale confirmed Lund's success in creating a separate construct of commitment, but still revealed that love typically accompanied commitment. Similarly, Fehr (1988) set out to create a prototype analysis of love and commitment in order to confirm their separateness. Through a series of six studies of words commonly associated with each construct, Fehr evaluated the commonalities and differences between the two. Rather than establishing the two as completely separate, love and

commitment were instead found to be related, but partially independent concepts. For example, one study asking participants to generate a list of features associated with love and commitment found that while the two shared 21 features listed by more than one participant, commitment included 19 unique features. Thus commitment and love were established as related yet separate constructs.

Further research has indicated relationship satisfaction as contributing to attraction commitment. One of the first studies of the relationship between satisfaction and commitment examined the scores of 30 couples on a variety of adjustment, commitment, and behavioral activities scales (Broderick and O'Leary, 1986). Results indicated a correlation between wives commitment and marital satisfaction, but not that of husbands. In 1999, however, Johnson, Caughlin, and Huston, established a significant correlation between satisfaction and commitment of both husbands and wives using a more recent commitment scale. More recently, Stanley, Markman, and Whitton (2002), interviewed 908 heterosexual couples and found as commitment increased, relationship satisfaction increased as well. Similar results were found in Hendrick, Hendrick, and Adler's 1988 study of 57 heterosexual couple's love styles. Commitment was found to be quite strongly related to satisfaction, a result the researchers attributed to commitment's underlying significance in close relationships.

Other research has focused on other factors which contribute to attraction commitment. For example, Stanley and Markman (1992) found a significant relationship between personal dedication and commitment. Their study sampled 141 subjects regarding their commitment and personal dedication to their current relationship. The results indicated personal dedication relates directly to what people mean when they rate their commitment levels. In 2001, Sprecher evaluated the relationship between rewards and equity in relationships and the level of

commitment reported. In this study, 101 students indicated how they perceived the distribution of resources in their current relationships. Sprecher found that as equity of resource distribution in the relationship increased so did satisfaction and commitment. In this same study, rewards were also found to be associated with commitment, which matched results found previously by Rusbult (1980, 1983). In an effort to provide support for the investment model of commitment, Rusbult evaluated the relationship between rewards and commitment in several studies. In each of the studies, an increase in the rewards from the relationship led to an increase in both commitment and relationship satisfaction. Personal closeness as an important factor in attraction commitment has also been examined. In the process of evaluating the validity of the Inclusion of Other within the Self (IOS) Scale, a scale measuring personal closeness, (Aron, Aron, and Smollen 1992), this scale was found to correlate with commitment and satisfaction. The researchers assumed the correlation to implicate the relationship between personal closeness and commitment. Clearly, many factors contribute to the attraction dimension of commitment.

While many areas of attraction commitment have received much attention, the effects of problems in relationships on commitment levels appear to be lacking in research. One of the few studies on relationship problems as they relate to commitment evaluated long-term marriages in the nineteen eighties. Swensen and Trahaug (1985) interviewed 36 married Norwegian couples in which the husband had retired within the past three years. Using a two question measure of commitment, the researchers found that those with higher commitment to each other as person's (i.e. attraction commitment) report fewer marital problems. While this initial study provides preliminary data, more research is needed to clearly establish the relationship between problems in relationships and commitment.

Research of problems in relationships

Types of problems

Research regarding problems in relationships has covered many different areas. Much of the initial research involved looking at the factors which predict divorce. In 1956 Goode investigated the causes of divorce as reported by 425 metropolitan mothers. The responses were divided into twelve categories. Lack of support and an authoritative, domineering husband were the two most mentioned complaints followed closely by a combination of drinking, gambling, and “running around.” Drinking alone ranked number four followed by personality conflicts, a lack of interest in home life, and a conflict of values. Levinger (1966) found many of the same complaints as Goode in his investigation of marital problems. Wives in his study complained of lack of love, neglect of home life, financial problems and drinking as well as physical, verbal, and emotional abuse. Husbands, however, brought up sexual incompatibility and in-law trouble more often. In 1982, Kitson and Sussman borrowed Goode’s (1956) coding system to evaluate causes of divorce 209 men and women. The results of this study indicated that women were more likely to complain of personality, authoritative husbands, “being out with the boys,” sex problems, non-support, infidelity on his part, and money management issues. Men, however, report wives infidelity, and complaints concerning relatives more often. Two years later Burns (1984) surveyed 335 divorced or separated men and women to find sexual incompatibility to be listed by 56 % of the men and 40 % of women. The second most common factor was lack of common interests/communication. Like previous studies, wives also mentioned husband’s lack of time at home, adultery, cruelty, and drinking. Once again, husbands brought up wives’ adultery and friction with relatives. Bloom, Niles, and Thatcher (1985) also evaluated relationship problems in newly separated individuals, but they also asked participants to speculate about their former

spouses complaints about them. Analysis of this data revealed that in the case of verbal abuse, communication difficulties, value conflicts, sexual difficulties, financial problems, boredom, and problems with children when participants mentioned their dissatisfaction with their attitudes or behavior, their spouses were probably dissatisfied with their behavior as well. These factors appear to remain relatively the same in recent studies of marital breakdown. Amato and Rogers (1997) found jealousy, infidelity, spending money foolishly, and drinking or using drugs as the most consistent predictors of divorce. Clearly, many factors contribute to the dissolution of a marriage.

Other researchers have looked at problems in unmarried romantic involvements and recently married couples. One study asked 185 college students to indicate the cause of their most recent breakup (Knox, Gibson, Zusman, Gallmeier, 1997). Dating alternative partners instead appeared as one of the most frequent answers. Drug use and violence/abusive behaviors were also commonly mentioned as reasons for the relationships end. In 2002, Sprecher looked directly at the effect of sexual satisfaction on relationship breakups in unmarried couples. She found that couples who remain together for over six months report increased scores in sexual satisfaction. Overall relationship satisfaction also appeared to correlate with sexual satisfaction. In a study of recently married couples, sexual satisfaction appeared to increase in intensity after the marriage along with communication (Storaaski & Markman, 1990). From this research, it appears that many of the same problems affecting divorced couples also appear in pre- and early marital relationships.

Effects of problems on relationship satisfaction

Many researchers have investigated the relationship between problems in relationships and relationships satisfaction. Most recently, Cramer (2000, 2001, 2002) investigated problems reported in pre-marital and new marriages. Cramer (2000) examined how differences of opinions regarding minor and major issues affect relationship satisfaction in undergraduates' romantic relationships. According to the study, the more differences of opinions reported between the couple, the lower the level of satisfaction. Even more highly correlated with relationship satisfaction is the style of conflict. Negative conflict styles lead to decrease satisfaction levels. In a similar study in 2001, Cramer again found disagreement regarding issues to influence relationship satisfaction. A survey of 108 undergraduates' perceptions of whether or not they typically agreed with their romantic partner regarding eight issues: money, recreation, friends, sexual relations, appropriate behavior, demonstration of affection, life philosophy, and ways of dealing with parents. The study found that increased consensus led to greater levels of satisfaction. Again in 2002, Cramer surveyed 108 undergraduates regarding their relationship satisfaction and conflict over major and minor issues. The results of this study repeated those of the previous studies; Cramer found relationship satisfaction to be more strongly correlated with conflict over both types of issues. Clearly, recent studies have shown a definite relationship between problems in relationships and satisfaction in the relationship.

Further investigation of the relationship between satisfaction and problems indicates both as important factors in stay/leave decisions. In 1982, Rusbult, Zembrodt, and Gunn presented four separate studies of undergraduates in romantic relationships. They found that subjects who had been more satisfied with their relationships before problems occurred were less likely to leave

or neglect the relationship. These same results were found for both married couples and those in serious relationships (Rusbult, Johnson, and Morrow, 1986). Questionnaires from 130 participants indicated that prior satisfaction with the relationship appears to aide in relationship stability despite problems in the relationship. Clearly the relationship between problems and satisfaction assist in regulating whether or not a relationship continues.

Critique of the literature

While research regarding commitment has provided insights into the nature of the construct, several areas still need investigating. First, a clear understanding of the relationship between each of the three dimensions of commitment has yet to be known. Without this information studies investigating one specific dimension of commitment must be certain the measure used only examine the desired aspect of commitment. For example, much of the cited research on attraction commitment involves married couples, but does not ensure that the commitment measure used accounts for the moral-normative commitment created by marriage vows (Johnson, Caughlin, & Huston, 1999; Swenson & Trahaug, 1985; Stanley & Markman, 1992; Stanley, Markman, and Whitton, 2002; Broderick & O'Leary, 1986; Scanzoni & Arnett, 1987). Also, children in relationships add to the level of constraint commitment, but much of the research neglects to separate couples with children from those without when measuring overall commitment (Burns, 1984; Heaton & Albrecht, 1991; Godwin & Scanzoni, 1989; Swenson & Trahaug, 1985). Also, much of the research focus has been on satisfaction and rewards associated with the relationship, but only one study has investigated how problems in relationships affect the attraction dimension of commitment (Swensen & Trahaug, 1985). Clearly, a need exists for research which investigates how problems in relationships affect attraction commitment

when major constraint and structural commitment factors such as marriage and children are absent.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Description of methodology

The present study is a non-experimental, correlation investigation of the relationship between problems reported in relationship and the level of commitment measured by Lund's commitment scale (1985). Forty-five college students in summer classes in a Mid-Western university were invited to participate in a quantitative study of relationship commitment. Participants filled out a survey which included: a demographic questionnaire, which asked participants questions about themselves and their current romantic relationships; Lund's commitment scale, a nine item measure of one partner's commitment to the relationship; and a checklist of common problems in relationships. The resulting data was used to evaluate the relationship between the level of commitment reported and the number of problems and type of problem reported.

Research design

In this study the design includes two major variables. First, the level of commitment is measured by responses to the Lund commitment scale (1985). This commitment scale consists of nine items measured by individuals' responses on a seven point Likert. Higher scores indicate greater commitment. The second set of variables includes a twenty-two item list of problems in which participants indicated whether or not the problem was present in the relationship. Individuals were then asked to rate the severity of the particular problems they reported in their

relationship on a seven point Likert scale. Higher scores indicate greater severity of the problem.

Population/Location

Eighty-nine surveys were distributed to students enrolled in summer classes at a small, Midwestern university. The four classes sampled included two introductory biology classes, one introductory human development class, and an intermediate level hospitality and tourism class. The student population at this university consists of 51% male students and 49% female students. The university has little ethnic diversity with 0.9 % of the student population being Hispanic, 1 % African American, 1.9% Asian American, 0.4% American Indian, 1.7% of the students coming internationally and the remaining students being Caucasian.

Sample

Of the eighty-nine surveys given, the forty-five participants responded in terms of a current romantic relationship made up the sample population. Of these participants forty-three were women and two were men. Four participants data were excluded from the results because of failure to complete all sections of the survey. Of the remaining forty-one participants, all indicated being involved in heterosexual relationships which ranges in length from 2 months to 22 years. The average length of relationship was 3 years, 11.75 months. Participant's ages ranged from 20 to 42 years of age with the average age of participant being 24.22 years. Partners' ages were reported by participants to range from 19 years to 50 years with an average age of 25.69 years. The study included 44 participants who indicate their ethnicity to be either White or Caucasian and one participant indicating a multi-racial ethnicity. Participant's partner's ethnicities as reported by the participants included 41 Caucasian or White, two African American, and one

multi-racial partner. Of the forty-five couples, three reported being involved in relationship with someone of a different ethnic background than their own. Fourteen respondents reported having children and 23 indicated they currently lived with their partner. The status of the relationships included 27 dating couples, 8 engaged couples, and 10 married couples.

Instrumentation

Appendix A shows the survey utilized in this study which consists of three parts. The first portion consists of questions investigating demographic information about the participant and their partner. Part two of the survey consists of the nine questions which make up Lund's commitment scale (1985). Finally, part three includes a list of common relationship problems in which participants were asked to check those currently found in their relationship.

The demographic portion of the survey was designed to acquire information about the participant's relationship status and other characteristics about the participant and their partner. The first question in part one requires a yes or no answer as to whether participants sees themselves as being involved in a romantic relationship. At this point person's responding "no" were invited to return the form without continuing. Those answering "yes" were asked to complete the remainder of the survey.

The Lund commitment scale, developed in 1985, consists of nine questions regarding the level of commitment felt toward the current relationship. Lund developed the scale from two studies designed to separate love and commitment as two distinct constructs which examined the reliability and validity for the commitment scale. Lund used Cronbach's Alpha to examine the reliability of the commitment scale (0.82). Validity testing investigated the association between the commitment scale and the participants other reports about their relationships. Commitment

increased in groups which defined themselves as more exclusive and pledged to continue their relationships. Length of time in a relationships correlated strongly with commitment, $r(111) = 0.36$, $p < 0.001$. A follow-up longitudinal study of 129 graduating seniors, fifty men and seventy-nine women, participating in heterosexual relationships were given the commitment scale once in February before graduation and once in June after graduation. By June, twenty-nine of the couples had broken up. T-tests identified the commitment scales taken between those continuing their relationship and those who had broken up as being significantly different, $t(126) = 8.07$. From these studies the Lund commitment scale has shown to be a reliable, valid measure of relationship commitment.

The third part of the survey consists of a list of common problems found in relationships. The list was developed by the author from common problems found in the literature regarding relationship commitment and in relationship evaluation forms. Twenty-two relationship problems are offered along with a seven point Likert scale to rate the perceived severity of the problem. The last item includes a space for participants to write in other problems which did not seem to fit the problems listed. Problems listed range from financial issues to sexual issues to problems with the partner's family.

Procedures

On June 16th, 2003 eighty-nine surveys were distributed to four summer classes with the instructor's consent. Informed consent was explained as implied by completion of the survey on the first page of the survey. Students were invited to remove the first page including the informed consent and keep that information. Students who wished to participate completed the survey and returned them face down to a pile outside the classroom which was collected later in the day.

Forty-five students responded to the questionnaire as currently being involved in a romantic relationship. Four of these participants were removed from the study for failing to complete all sections of the questionnaire, leaving forty-one remaining participants.

Data analysis

The Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (Pearson's r) statistic was used to determine the relationships between relationship commitment and total number of problems in the relationship, since the objective of this study was to determine the extent to which these two variables related. A Student's t -test was also used to evaluate any significant differences between commitment scores of participants who indicated a particular problem was present in their relationship and those who did not.

In order to note the effect of marriage and children on commitment levels as well as evaluate the effect of problem severity the data was evaluated in four different data sets. First, all problems listed for all participants were analyzed. Next, the same analysis was performed using the results for only unmarried participants without children. Then, only the problems rated with a severity of four or higher were evaluated for all participants as well as for only unmarried participants without children.

Limitations

Time and financial resources limited this study in the instrument used. The Lund commitment scale (1985) utilized here is neither the most recently developed commitment scale nor the most thorough. The Lund commitment scale (1985) consists of only nine questions while Rusbult's (1983) measure examines commitment through a series of sections. Time also played a

role in limiting the selection of the questionnaire evaluating problems in the relationship. A list of problems cited multiple times both in the literature and in relationship evaluation scales was compiled by the researcher. Since participants were asked to complete the entire questionnaire during class time the size of the survey was limited, however a space was included for participants to write in other problems which did not fit under the available categories. Lund's scale provided the best validity for the small size of the scale. Also, both measures were chosen in part due to their availability for free public use. Other, more costly, measures were not examined due to financial barriers.

Other limitations to this study also exist in the procedure. For example, the list of problems generated for the study was not examined to determine whether or not each problem listed represented a single, independent problem. Thus, it is possible that participants may have reported two problems in their relationship when only one problem actually exists, but two of the listed problems fit as descriptors of the problem. While a space was included for the participants to list other problems which did not specifically fit with the problems listed, the possibility still remains that students may have indicated more problems than truly exist in their relationship.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Results

All tables can be found in Appendix B. Table 1 shows the ranges and averages for the commitment score, number of problems, and several demographic features. From the results we can see that at least one person scored the highest possible score on the commitment scale, but the lowest score was 4.33 points higher than the possible lowest score. No single participant reported having all possible twenty- three problems in their relationship and no one reported having no problems in their relationship. Participant's ages ranged from 20 years to 42 years with an average age of 24.22 years. The ages of participants' partners ranged from 19 years to 50 years with an average of 25.69 years. Relationships ranged in length from 2 months to 22 years with an average of about 4 years.

Table 2 shows the average severity for each problem when indicated as being present in the relationship. Most average severities of problems fell between 3.00 and 4.00. "Other problems" rated the highest for average severity of problem out of the twenty-three problems listed with an average severity of 5.50. Working too many hours or conflicting hours ranked second highest in severity followed by problems with drugs and alcohol, and then lack or loss of respect all with average severity levels above 4.00.

3 shows the results for the Pearson's r correlation between average commitment the total number of problems reported in the relationships for each of the four data sets; all couples, all couples in which the severity of the problems were indicated to be at a severity level of four or higher, only unmarried couples without children, and those unmarried couples without children in which the severity level of the problems were indicated to be at a severity level of four or higher.

The figure shows the number of problems in a relationship significantly correlates with average commitment score for three out of the four data sets. Problems at all severity levels reported by all couples significantly relate to the average commitment score ($r = -0.2977$, $p > 0.05$). When married couples and couples with children were removed from the data set the correlation remained significant ($r = -.34789$, $p > 0.05$). When problems rated with severity levels below four were removed the results for the correlation between number of problems and average commitment score for all couples did not reach significance ($r = -0.1257$, $p < .05$). However, when married couples and couples with children were removed the results reached significance ($r = -0.39997$, $p > .001$).

Figure 4 shows the results for the Student's t-test comparing the average commitment scores of couples indicating a particular problem present in their relationship and those without the problem for all participants. Of all the problems only the presence of infidelity ($p = .001$) and alcohol and drug issues ($p = .041$) significantly relate to commitment scores. Trust comes close to significance as well ($p = .073$). The table also indicates the number of participants reporting each of the problems present. Problems with money appeared most frequently with 28 out of the 41 participants indicating the presence of money problems in the relationship. Worrying ($n = 22$), communication ($n = 21$), and issues with goals ($n = 20$) were the next most reported problems. Only eight participants marked lack or loss of respect as being present in their relationship, the least frequently indicated problem.

Figure 5 shows the results of the same Student's t-test in figure four performed when married couples and couples with children are removed from the data. When only unmarried couples without children are taken into consideration infidelity decreases in significance ($p = .009$), but alcohol and drug issues increase in significance ($p = .003$). Both problems remain the

only significant issues indicated. Trust remains close to significance ($p = .078$) and issues with temper outbursts come close to significance as well ($p = .071$). Money issues remains the most frequently indicated problem with 21 out of the 32 unmarried couples without children indicating its presence. Next most frequent is jealousy ($n = 19$) followed by worrying ($n = 17$) and then communication ($n = 16$). Only five of the unmarried couples without children indicated respect as an issues in their relationship.

Figure 6 demonstrates the results of the Student's t-test of significance between problems indicated with a severity level of four or higher and average commitment scores of all couples indicating the presence of the problem in their relationship and those who did not. When severity ratings are taken into account, trust ($p = .010$) and jealousy ($p = .020$) emerge as significant. Abuse comes close to significant ($p = .053$), while money issues remains the most frequently indicated problem with a severity level of four or higher ($n = 12$). Several problems had fewer than five responses at this level with dependency being the least indicated ($n = 2$). Unlike the first two data sets, infidelity did not reach significance ($p = .133$) for all couples with severe problems.

Figure 7 shows the same Student's t-test results when couples who are married or have children are removed from the data set. Among unmarried couples without children indicating problems with severity levels of four or higher, several problems were found to significantly relate to average commitment scores. However, numbers of participants indicating problems at these levels decreased greatly. Issues with alcohol and drugs appears to be most significant ($p = .0000875$, $n = 4$), followed by temper ($p = .004$, $n = 4$), abuse ($p = .018$, $n = 3$), and trust ($p = .031$, $n = 4$). Again, infidelity did not reach significance ($p = .263$, $n = 3$). A significance test could not be performed for issues with in-laws as only one unmarried participant without children indicated this issue at a severity of four or higher. The most indicated problem in this group of

participants was jealousy ($n = 10$).

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Summary

The study evaluated relationship commitment in order to establish whether the number of problems or type of problems found in a relationship affect the level of commitment reported toward the relationship. As predicted, data analysis found a significant correlation between number of problems reported by all couples and the level of commitment felt toward the relationship. When the number of problems in a relationship increases, the level of commitment felt toward the relationship appears to decrease. A significant correlation was also found between number of problems and relationship commitment for only unmarried couples without children. This correlation increased in significance when only those problems rated at a severity level of four or higher were taken into consideration. Clearly, for unmarried couples without children the number and severity of problems in a relationship affects the level of commitment felt toward the relationship. However, no significant correlation was found for all couples when severity of the problem was taken into account. Several possibilities for this discrepancy will be suggested in the limitations section.

The study also examined differences in commitment scores between couples reporting the presence of a specific problem in their relationship and those who do not indicate experiencing that problem. Within all participants only the presence of infidelity and alcohol and drug issues significantly affected commitment level reported. Trust comes close to significance, which probably corresponds greatly with the presence of infidelity. Similar results were found when

only unmarried participants without children were taken into consideration. Issues with temper also came close to significance in unmarried couples without children.

Different problems emerge as significant when only those problems rated with a severity level of four or higher are taken into consideration. When problem severity is taken into account for all participants, trust and jealousy appear to be the only problems significantly affecting the average commitment score. Abuse comes close to significance, but infidelity and alcohol and drug issues do not. However, alcohol and drug issues do appear to significantly affect commitment levels for only unmarried couples without children who report these issues at a severity level of four or higher. Severe problems with abuse, trust, and temper outbursts also appear to significantly affect commitment in unmarried couples without children. Severe problems with hours worked come close to significance for these couples as well.

Limitations

The sample population caused several limitations throughout the study. First, the generalizability of the results is limited by the type of sample used. All of the students were enrolled in summer classes at a university, thus the results may not apply to population outside of the undergraduate, college population. Also, the final sample size was relatively small ($N = 41$) and when married participants and those with children were removed from the data sets the sample was even smaller ($N = 32$). For example, when the data for only unmarried couples without children with severe problems was analyzed thirteen problems had five or fewer participants reporting the problem as severe. For the same data set, analysis could not be performed for problems with their partner's parents because only one participant indicated it to be a problem. A larger sample size in the future might change the validity of the results. Finally,

diversity was greatly lacking in the study. Only two participants were male which greatly decreases the generalizability of the study to the male population. Some possible reasons for the lack of male participants exist. For example, of the four classrooms given surveys the human development class, the largest class involved in the study consisted almost entirely of females. The other classrooms were also disproportionate in the male to female ratio, with more females than males. Besides lacking in gender diversity, the study also lacked ethnic diversity. The only ethnicities mentioned were White/Caucasian, African American/Black, and multi-racial. Of the 45 participants and their partners only six were not White/Caucasian. Clearly, the sample population itself caused several limitations to the study.

The Lund commitment scale appeared to have some limitations as well. While the validity of the Lund commitment scale has been shown, several participants appeared to struggle with some of the questions' meanings. For example, five respondents with high scores on the rest of the commitment test indicated that another potential partner would not have to be very attractive for the person to start a new relationship. This response indicates lower commitment levels than would be expected from their responses to the other 8 items. Several possible reasons exist to explain these responses. Obviously, the possibility exists that no misinterpretation occurred and that all five respondents genuinely meant to report that they would leave their current relationship and start a new relationship with another partner even if the other partner was not very attractive. However, the wording of the question may have caused some confusion. The item asks "How attractive would a potential partner have to be for you to pursue a new relationship?" Participants were asked to rate their responses to this question on a 7 point Lickert scale from (1) not at all attractive to (7) very much. One possibility is that participants misunderstood the question itself or the scale. This particular question is one of only two

reversed scoring questions in the study. Perhaps some participants meant to imply they had better commitment, but did not understand the reverse scoring of the question and mistakenly rated their response as a seven instead of a one. Another possibility is that participants misunderstood the word “attractive.” One participant actually wrote in “personality wise” to indicate their response did not mean physical attraction alone. Others may also have interpreted the word “attractive” to mean physical attraction alone instead of overall attractiveness as the question intends to imply which could have influenced their responses. Another possibility is that some respondents did not understand that this question implied they would leave their current relationship to pursue the new relationship. Participants may have interpreted the question to mean outside of their current relationship. Other participants may not have felt leaving the current relationship would be necessary or that commitment in their relationship would be effected by a new partner. One participant wrote next to the question, “Why assume that another partner is a reason to end a relationship?” Other questions from this scale may have been misinterpreted as well. After a question asking about feeling obligated to continue the relationship, one participant wrote; “Sorry, I don’t understand. I don’t feel obligated at all, but I will be with him forever.” Clearly, questions on the Lund commitment scale may have caused difficulty for some participants.

The problems section of the questionnaire also may have caused some misunderstanding. For example, some participants marked all the problems listed as being present in their relationship, but then rated the majority of them as being (1) minimal in severity. Others wrote severity scores in all the blanks meant for checkmarks indicating the problem was present in the relationship. While these individuals may have meant to imply that all the problems were present, perhaps they misunderstood the directions and felt they needed to rate the severity for all the problems listed. Also, four participants did not indicate any problems on the third page of the

study even though this page contained the majority of the possible questions. Results for these participants were not included in the analyzed data.

Conclusions

The results of this study link well with the literature and several conclusions can be made from this data. First, the changes in commitment scores associated with changes in number of problems reported connect the previous research on relationship satisfaction, problems in relationships, and relationship commitment scores. Previous research regarding the moral-normative and constraint aspects of commitment lends well to explaining the differences in results between all couples rating problems with severities of four or higher and the other data sets as well. Also, the individual problems found to significantly relate to relationship commitment levels correspond well with the previous literature on problems in relationships and relationship commitment. Differences in the results of each data set can also be partially explained by previous research on moral and constraint commitment aspects. Overall, much of the data fits well with the literature reviewed.

A significant relationship was found between the increase in number of problems and the decrease in commitment scores. These results coincide with the previous research on relationship satisfaction, problems in relationships, and commitment levels. Previous research found that divorced couples report problems as the cause of their separation (Goode, 1956, Levinger, 1966, Kitson & Sussman, 1982, and Burns, 1984), while other research by Cramer (2000, 2001, 2002) found couples who agree more have greater satisfaction. Clearly, problems decrease relationship satisfaction. Since other studies (Broderick & O'Leary, 1986, Johnson, 1999, Stanley, Markman, & Whitton, 2002, and Hendrick, Hendrick, & Adler, 1988) have found greater satisfaction

contributes to relationship commitment. A connection between commitment and problems in a relationship can be inferred. The current results connect these studies by demonstrating a direct link between increases in number of problems and lower levels of commitment for every data group except all couples reporting problems of a severity level of four or higher.

One possible explanation for the difference between the all couples with severe problems data set results and the other groups' results may be that couples with severe problems who remain together have higher levels of moral-normative or constraint commitment. Previous studies by Goode (1956), Heaton and Albrecht (1991), and Stanley and Markman (1992) agree that unhappy couples that stay together show higher levels of moral and constraint commitment. Johnson (1991) also predicted that high levels of structural commitment can be found in couples that stay together despite low levels of attraction and moral commitment. Since marriage and the presence of children in a relationship increase moral and constraint commitment, the group which included married couples with children who also reported higher severity problems would be expected to have higher levels of these types of commitment. Thus, number of problems would have a lesser effect on overall commitment levels as found.

Problems found in this study to affect commitment levels appear to be similar to problems mentioned in previous research. In the present study, three out of the four data sets found infidelity significantly related to commitment levels. This matches the results found by Goode (1956), Kitson and Sussman (1982), and, Burns (1984), and Amato and Rogers (1997) in studies evaluating the causes of divorce. Infidelity continues to be the only problem consistently found to impact commitment levels. While the group which included all participants with high severity problems did not demonstrate this finding, only three participants in this group indicated severe infidelity as a problem and all three were unmarried and did not have children. Thus a very small

sample size may have affected the results. Trust, which relates directly to infidelity, came close to significance in both data sets where severity was not taken into account and reached significance in both data sets evaluating severe problems.

The other problems found to relate to commitment levels have all been indicated in previous research as well. Issues with alcohol and drugs were found to affect to commitment in every data set except the all participants with severe problems group. One reason for the discrepancy between groups may be that when AODA issues become severe, couples split up. Those couples who remain together despite serious issues like AODA may have high constraint or moral commitment levels holding them together (Johnson, 1991). Amato and Rogers (1997) also found problems with AODA to affect commitment levels. In the same study Amato and Rogers found jealousy affects commitment levels as well. The current study found similar results for severe jealousy when evaluating all participants' data. Abuse and temper outbursts were the only two other problems found to impact commitment levels in the current study. Previous research by Burns (1984) indicated similar results with problems with spousal cruelty. Clearly, the results found in the current study coincide with and add to previous literature regarding problems in relationships and relationship commitment.

Clinical implications

The results of the current study make clear the importance of problems in relationships and the effect they have on relationship commitment. Since the number of problems affects commitment levels, therapists working with couples should pay attention to not only the severe problems in relationships, but the less severe problems as well. Therapists should also note that severe issues with jealousy, infidelity, emotional, physical, or verbal abuse, alcohol and drug

abuse, trust, and temper outbursts appear to affect most couples relationship commitment more than other issues. Clearly, individuals will differ in which problems they deem more or less important so therapists must take into account clients differing experiences. Issues in relationships affect each relationship differently. Therapists should also make themselves aware of any constraints, moral or otherwise, keeping the couple together. Since marriage and children appear to lessen the impact of problems on relationship commitment. Finding what keeps the couple together would be an excellent place to highlight the couple's strengths. Therapists might utilize the survey used in this study to evaluate the number and severity of problems within the relationship as well as the commitment level toward the relationship. The survey could be given prior to beginning therapy and then again during therapy to check the progress of the couple.

Recommendations

Based on the current study several recommendations for future research can be made. First, new tools for analyzing overall commitment levels and separating attraction, moral, and constraint commitment levels would greatly improve research in this area. Many questions still remain about what each component of commitment contributes to overall commitment as well as how each is affected by problems in the relationship. Once researchers can see the affect each component has on overall commitment future studies could more accurately evaluate the effect of problems on commitment.

Differences in the ways in which problems affect commitment levels would be another area for future research. Investigations into which problems affect relationship commitment more might be beneficial in discovering which problems need a more immediate focus. Researchers may also investigate reasons why some problems affect commitment in some relationships, but

other relationships with similar problems are not affected. Clearly, infidelity negatively affects commitment levels in most relationships, but some remain unaffected. Discovering what holds some relationships together when others end would greatly impact couple's therapy.

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APPENDIX A: TABLES

Table 1

Shows the ranges and averages for commitment scores, number of problems reported, and demographic data.

Range of data	High	Low	Mean
Commitment scores	7.0	4.33	6.02
Number of problems	20	1	8.20
Age of participant	42 years	20 years	24.22 years
Age of partner	50 years	19 years	25.69 years
Length of	264 (22 years)	2 months	47.75 months

Table 2

Severity level means for each problem indicated to be present in a relationship.

Problem	Mean severity
Money	3.39
Income	3.83
Success	3.83
Hours	4.44
sexual issues	3.38
Sexual functioning	3.79
Jealousy	3.53
Infidelity	3.67
AODA	4.27
Temper	3.86
Abuse	3.78
Worrying	3.32
Nagging	3.17
Responsibility	3.22
Dependency	3.00
Selfishness	3.00
Goals	3.25
in laws	3.08
Interests	3.57
communication	3.57
Trust	3.23
Respect	4.00
Other	5.50

Table 3

Significance of Pearson's correlation coefficient between average commitment and total number of problems for four different data sets; all participants data, data for only unmarried participants without children, and the first two data sets using only problems with reported severity of level four or higher.

Participants data used	Number of participants	Pearson's r	Level of significance
All couples	41	-0.2977	0.05
All couples (problem severity > 4)	41	-0.1257	NS
Unmarried couples without children	32	-0.34789	0.05
Unmarried couples without children (problem severity >4)	32	-0.39997	0.001

Table 4

Level of significance found with Student's t-test comparing average commitment scores between participants reporting a specific problem found in their relationship and participants would did not out of all forty-one participants.

Problem	Significance	Number of participants reporting problem present
Money	0.599827	28
Income	0.662413	18
Success	0.214649	18
Hours	0.411348	16
Sexual issues	0.937531	13
Sexual functioning	0.199958	14
Jealousy	0.263632	19
Infidelity	0.001046	9
AODA	0.041069	11
Temper	0.199958	14
Abuse	0.103013	9
Worrying	0.52449	22
Nagging	0.614264	12
Responsibility	0.273269	18
Dependency	0.714065	10
Selfishness	0.388305	12
Goals	0.232617	20
in laws	0.63546	13
Interests	0.30032	14
communication	0.327007	21
Trust	0.073	13
Respect	0.426091	8

Table 5

Level of significance found with Student's t-test comparing average commitment scores between participants reporting a specific problem found in their relationship and participants would did not out of the thirty-two participants who were not married and did not have children.

Problem	Significance	Number of participants reporting problem present
Money	0.683189	21
Income	0.615181	12
Success	0.233576	13
Hours	0.195822	12
sexual issues	0.381151	8
Sexual functioning	0.244775	10
Jealousy	0.919427	19
Infidelity	0.009438	8
AODA	0.003102	8
Temper	0.070805	9
Abuse	0.145646	7
Worrying	0.155955	17
Nagging	0.953339	9
responsibility	0.155955	13
dependency	0.86815	9
selfishness	0.341312	10
Goals	0.248534	15
in laws	0.613597	10
Interests	0.685416	12
communication	0.24699	16
Trust	0.078107	10
Respect	0.223188	5

Table 6

Level of significance found with Student's t-test comparing average commitment scores between participants reporting a specific problem found in their relationship at a severity level of four or higher and participants would did not out of all forty-one participants.

Problem	significance	participants
Money	0.414114	12
Income	0.876213	9
Success	0.217112	10
Hours	0.212039	9
sexual issues	0.819348	6
Sexual functioning	0.182112	8
Jealousy	0.020597	10
Infidelity	0.133341	3
AODA	0.228335	7
Temper	0.466261	7
Abuse	0.052754	5
Worrying	0.282911	9
Nagging	0.193087	4
responsibility	0.496281	7
dependency	0.153194	2
Selfishness	0.54821	3
Goals	0.171739	9
in laws	0.876855	3
Interests	0.353234	7
communication	0.63652	10
Trust	0.010547	5
Respect	0.400645	5

Table 7

Level of significance found with Student's t-test comparing average commitment scores between participants reporting a specific problem found in their relationship at a severity level of four or higher and participants who did not out of the thirty-two participants who were not married and did not have children.

Problem	significance	participants
Money	0.358952	9
Income	0.537079	6
Success	0.156668	7
Hours	0.077416	6
sexual issues	0.823604	4
Sexual functioning	0.511192	7
Jealousy	0.113866	10
Infidelity	0.262616	3
AODA	8.75E-05	4
Temper	0.003922	4
Abuse	0.018453	3
Worrying	0.22279	7
Nagging	0.559296	2
responsibility	0.213228	4
dependency	0.264294	2
selfishness	0.220859	2
Goals	0.155343	6
in laws	N/A	1
Interests	0.196899	5
communication	0.200793	6
Trust	0.030985	4
Respect	0.262616	3

APPENDIX B: QUESTIONNAIRE

Project Title: The Impact of Problems on Relationship Commitment

Tiffany Husby, a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin-Stout, is conducting a research project regarding how problems in a relationship effect the level of commitment one feels towards that relationship. The researcher hopes to develop a better understanding for the factors affecting relationship continuity and dissolution. This is a study in which approximately 100 students from undergraduate classes at the University of Wisconsin-Stout will be surveyed regarding their current relationships.

You are invited to participate in this study by voluntarily completing the following questionnaire.

It is anticipated that this study will not present any physical, emotional, mental, or social risk to you. The information gathered from your questionnaire will be kept confidential and the findings of this project will not contain your name or any identifying information.

Your participation in this project is completely voluntary. If at any time you choose to stop participating in this project, you may do so, without coercion or prejudice. Please feel free to simply not return your questionnaire.

Once this study has been completed, the analyzed findings will be available for your information.

Any questions or concerns that you may have before, during, or after the research project should be addressed to the following individuals:

Researcher – Tiffany Husby husbyt@uwstout.edu (715)-233-1062

Researcher Advisor – Dr. Dale Hawley hawleyd@uwstout.edu (715)-232-1273

Any student wishing to address relationship or other issues may contact the Counseling Center located in 410 Bowman Hall by calling (715)-232-2468 or the Clinical Services Center located in room 221 of the Voc. Rehab. Building at (715)-232-2404.

Questions or complaints about the rights of research participants can be addressed to Sue Foxwell, Human Protections Administrator, UW-Stout Institutional Review Board for the Protections of Human Subjects in Research, 11 Harvey Hall, Menomonie, WI 54751, phone (715)-232-1126.

I understand that by completing this questionnaire, I am implying my informed consent as a participating volunteer in this study. I am aware of the basic nature of this study and agree that any potential risks are exceedingly small. I understand the potential benefits from the successful completion of this study. I understand that the researcher will protect my confidentiality as a participant by not requiring any identifying personal information about me. I realize that I have the right to refuse to participate at any time in the study without coercion or prejudice.

Relationship Problems and Commitment Level Questionnaire

Completion of this questionnaire implies informed consent of research participation.

Part I. Demographic Information

Please fill in the following information regarding yourself.

1. Do you consider yourself currently involved in a romantic relationship?
Yes ____ No ____

**If yes, please complete the following information about yourself and your partner.
If no, you may return the remainder of the survey.**

2. Your Gender: ____ Partner's Gender: ____
3. Your Age: ____ Partner's Age: ____
4. Your ethnicity ____ Partner's Ethnicity ____
5. Length of current relationship: ____
(Please specify number of weeks, months, and years.)
6. Current relationship status (circle one): A. Dating B. Engaged C. Married
7. Are you and your partner currently living together? Yes / No
8. Do either you or your partner have children? Yes / No

Part II. Relationship Commitment

(The following portion has been adapted from the Lund Commitment Scale, 1985)

Please rate the following questions regarding your current romantic relationship.

9. How likely is it that your relationship will be permanent?
____ Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very much
10. How attracted are you to other potential partners or a single life style?
____ Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very much
11. How likely is it that you and your partner will be together six months from now?
____ Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very likely
12. How much trouble would ending your relationship be to you personally?
____ Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very much
13. How attractive would a potential partner have to be for you to pursue a new relationship?
____ Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very much

14. How likely are you to pursue another relationship or single life in the future?

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very likely

15. How obligated do you feel to continue this relationship?

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very much

16. In your opinion, how committed is your partner to this relationship?

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very much

17. In your opinion, how likely is your partner to continue this relationship?

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very much

Part II. Relationship Issues

(The following portion of this survey has been adapted from the Marital Evaluation Checklist, 1984.)

The following is a list of common areas in which couples can have relationship problems. Please review the list carefully and place a (✓) in the space next to each problem which is present in your relationship, whether the problem involves you or for your partner. Then, for each problem checked please rate the level of severity of the problem as it affects your relationship on a scale of 1 (minimal effect on the relationship) to 7 (severe effect on the relationship).

	Minimal					Severe	
18. ___ Issues with money management (i.e. controlling money, budgeting expenses, excessive spending, gambling, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
19. ___ Amount of income earned	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
20. ___ Type of work or level of success	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
21. ___ Working too many hours	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
22. ___ Sexual issues. (i.e. techniques used/proposed, level of experience, initiation of sex, desire for "open" relationship, frequency of sex, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
23. ___ Sexual function (i.e. lack of affection, lack of sexual desire, impotence, health problems, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	Minimal						Severe
24. ____ Jealousy or flirting	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
25. ____ Unfaithfulness	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
26. ____ Problems with drugs or alcohol	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
27. ____ Temper outbursts	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
28. ____ Emotional, verbal, or physical abuse	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
29. ____ Constant worrying	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
30. ____ Nagging	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
31. ____ Lack of responsibility or childish behavior	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
32. ____ Dependency on others (i.e. parents, friends, partner, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
33. ____ Selfishness or lack of cooperation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
34. ____ Setting/agreeing on goals or priorities	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
35. ____ Relationship with partner's parents and friends	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
36. ____ Shared interest/social life	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
37. ____ Communication problems	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
38. ____ Lack/loss of trust	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
39. ____ Lack/loss of respect	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
40. ____ Other (please specify) _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
